

Imke Polland, Michael Basseler, Ansgar Nünning,  
Sandro M. Moraldo (eds.)

in collaboration with Mareike Glier

Europe's Crises and Cultural Resources of Resilience:  
Conceptual Explorations and Literary Negotiations

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Michael Basseler, Andreas Langenohl,  
Ansgar Nünning, Katharina Stornig



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Ed. by Imke Polland, Michael Basseler, Ansgar Nünning,  
Sandro M. Moraldo, in collaboration with Mareike Glier. -  
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Fax: (0651) 41504  
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E-Mail: [wvt@wvttrier.de](mailto:wvt@wvttrier.de)

## PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the last decade, Europe has seen several crises – whether medially constructed or discussed in the Realpolitik of the EU – that particularly affected Southern European states and societies. In the face of such experiences, how do these countries and their communities deal with and react to these crises? What are their cultural resources of negotiating changes, adapting to new circumstances, and productively handling crises? This book sets out to discuss resources of resilience from a cultural studies perspective. Its contributions initiate a dialogue between German and Southern European contexts, offer theoretical explorations and case studies that range from literary works to music and memory, via visual representations and political communication, to questions of genre and European integration.

This volume emerged from an international and interdisciplinary conference held at the Villa Sciarra in Rome in September 2018. At this conference, PhD students, post-docs, and university professors from various disciplinary backgrounds, e.g. History, the Study of German, British, Italian, and Portuguese literature and culture, or Economics and Political Science, gathered to discuss facets of Europe's current and past crises and the various ways of how they are and may be met creatively and thus turned into productive moments. The intensive discussions during the conference paved the way for this book with its sections on literary and cultural resources of resilience, imaginative spaces and European entangled (hi)stories.

The conference was sponsored by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) with funds of the German Federal Foreign Office within the programme “Academic Dialogues with Southern Europe” (Hochschuldialog mit Südeuropa). In the spirit of dialogue as promoted by the funding line, not only the conference, but also this volume discusses Europe's cultural resources of resilience in both English and German language contributions. This dialogue is enriched by the multifarious examples from German, Italian, Portuguese contexts.

Organising the conference and publishing the results of its discussions would not have been possible without substantial support. We would hereby like to sincerely thank our kind hosts at the Istituto Italiano di Studi Germanici, particularly the director Prof. Roberta Ascarelli and her assistants for their gracious hospitality, their excellent preparation work and their help throughout the conference. Moreover, we are grateful to the kind invitation by the Casa di Goethe in Rome, where one of the keynote speeches of the conference was given to a wider interested public.

We would like to particularly highlight our thanks to Mareike Glier, assistant of the PhDnet program at Justus Liebig University's International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC) in Gießen for her extensive assistance in proofreading and her valuable comments, as well as her repeated and attentive checks of the articles and bibliographies, and their formatting. We would also like to thank the IPP team, David

Susa and Silvia Casazza, for their help with these formal checks. Additionally, we thank Simon Ottersbach, Max Bergmann, and Franziska Eick for their assistance with the formalities of the publication process. Our final thanks go to the contributors to this volume, whose stimulating and thorough work addresses various intriguing case studies on cultural resilience in the face of the crises in/of Europe.

Giessen and Bologna, December 2019

Imke Polland, Michael Basseler, Sandro M. Moraldo & Ansgar Nünning

## SECOND PREFACE: EUROPEAN RESILIENCE IN THE CORONA CRISIS

We had already completed the editorial work on this volume when a serious cyber attack took place at Justus Liebig University on December 8, 2019. Unidentified hackers had implanted the infamous Emotet/Ryuk malware combo and thereby tied up JLU's entire IT infrastructure, leaving thousands of employees and students without access to the internet, emails, and cloud computing. Consequently, the attack also obstructed any further work on the manuscript (the files and their backups were stored on the university's suddenly inaccessible servers). The incident made us critically aware of how vulnerable we are in our increasing dependence on digital infrastructure, without which even the most basic work can become a real challenge. From one moment to the next, every single task became unimaginably difficult and time-consuming. We were fortunate, however, that our European colleagues were very sympathetic and supportive as we tried to restore previous versions of the manuscripts as a last resort in case the data on our servers would be irretrievably lost. And luckily, this worst-case scenario did not become reality: after several weeks between trembling uncertainty and intense crisis-management the files could finally be restored.

After being delayed by the effects of the tech-virus, we resumed our work on the finishing touches in late February 2020. What happened then would not only make the cyber crisis look miniscule, but instantly and radically (and perhaps lastingly) changed the very world we're living in. The global pandemic triggered by the outbreak of the coronavirus, or COVID-19, in Wuhan, China, in late 2019 soon also hit Europe in a hitherto unthinkable way, bringing fear and death first to our neighbours in Italy, and then rapidly spread to virtually all other countries across Europe and beyond. In light of this sudden and overwhelming crisis, we saw and continue to see which resources contribute to Europe's resilience, on the one hand, and what factors hinder resilience, on the other. While some commentators in the media soon lamented that the virus relentlessly revealed the extent to which European solidarity is nothing but a distant dream, a utopia meant to jolly people along on Sundays,<sup>1</sup> we also saw remarkable resilience, e.g. in the way that the Italian people withstood the devastation around them by collectively performing impromptu renditions of resistance songs like "Bella Ciao", thus setting an example for the rest of the continent and the world. Currently, it is being debated whether the corona crisis will ultimately propel our societies into dark ages of nationalism, total isolation and a complete lack of solidarity, or whether it has the potential to transform society for the better, paving the way for a new world order in which solidarity and a new we-culture trump egotism and turbo capitalism.

We, of course, do not know what the future will bring or hold in store for Europe and the rest of the world, but we sincerely hope that we will find ways to cope with all the unheard-of challenges resulting from the global pandemic. What the corona crisis

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1 See Nils Minkmar, „Was für eine Enttäuschung“, *Der Spiegel*, March 17, 2020.

shows us already, however, is that European resilience will depend not only on political and economic systems, but also on ideas, common values, and cultural practices to shape a common future. One does not need prophetic vision to anticipate that many competing narratives of Europe's resilience and vulnerability will proliferate in the wake of the current situation. And while the volume at hand – conceived and completed at a time when the sheer scope of the corona crisis seemed unimaginable – may almost appear like a nostalgic “Bella Ciao” choir from a distant past, its underlying premises and concerns are now more pertinent than ever. We need the perspectives of the humanities and social sciences to understand what factors contribute to resilience on a societal, cultural, and transnational level – in Europe and globally.

Let us all keep our fingers crossed that the hopeful and optimistic attitude expressed by so many Italians during this terrible tragedy will continue to prevail: *andrà tutto bene*.

Giessen, March 2020

Michael Basseler, Ansgar Nünning & Imke Polland



Dedicated to our dear colleagues and friends in Italy,  
especially the Lombardy region and particularly Bergamo and Milano,  
whose resilience has been and continues to be tested to the utmost.



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INTRODUCTION:  
EUROPE'S CRISES AND CULTURAL RESOURCES OF RESILIENCE

MICHAEL BASSELER, IMKE POLLAND AND ANSGAR NÜNNING

1. Crisis? What Crisis?

'Europe's crises' is a suggestive phrase that calls up all kinds of associations regarding the various political, social, environmental, and economic contexts and events that have troubled the project of modern Europe lately: the financial or Euro crisis in the wake of the Greek debt crisis, the so-called refugee crisis, and the crises of European democracies as mirrored in the surge of right-wing and nationalist movements immediately come to mind, but they are only the tip of a much bigger iceberg. What is more, 'Europe's crises' is suggestive because it implies that these crises are objectively given, rather than socially, culturally, and medially constructed. Effectively, however, "speaking about or diagnosing a crisis includes not only defining certain action-roles, but as a result of the systematic logic of the metaphor, also linking past, present and future in a comprehensive plot" (A. Nünning 2012: 75). The pervasive crisis discourse thus becomes a narrative and interpretive frame; it serves as a tool for classification and description as well as a performative label that conjures up notions of immediate threat and looming dangers.

Although starting from the numerous perceived crises *in* Europe as well as the crisis of the very concept *of* Europe, which have been evoked socially and politically in recent years, this volume suggests a change in perspective. Once one shifts the focus from the diagnostic mode implied in the crisis metaphor to a more generative and forward-looking approach to dealing with crisis at a social and cultural level, the question arises as to which cultural resources Europe has at its disposal to respond creatively to the crises and understand them as a productive moment. This volume, resulting from a symposium held in Rome in September 2018, does not focus solely on describing and analyzing crises but looks at resilience as the ability to master crises well. More specifically, it asks how the focus on cultural resources of resilience betters and augments our understanding of the culture-specific approaches to crises in and of Europe. Especially in the context of the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome, we can look to the 2018 elections in France, which, as before in the Netherlands and Austria, revealed a great support of pro-European visions, thus halting the Euroscepticism and "leave EU"-movements. This momentum offers the opportunity to develop and deepen a notion of Europe and build and strengthen Europe and its narratives in the socio-political discourse (Prantl 2016; Hanenberg 2012, 2008/9). The academic discourse on Europe draws attention to such European narratives that go beyond national readings (Hanenberg/Gil 2013; Hanenberg 2015, 2004) as well as to the various landscapes of power and democracy in the (post-)national fabric of Europe (Beck 2015 [1986], 2012; Müller 2013).

Europe as a malleable construct is based on transnational and transcultural links as well as interconnected, or entangled, histories. These histories both exceed and precede the concept of the nation and therefore form the cultural foundations of Europe on which the focus of this volume lies. By this, we do not mean to imply an ill-conceived notion of a European *Leitkultur* as it was recently (re-)introduced in the political debate in Germany; by contrast, we emphasise a plurality of – old and new – cultural resources that may be mobilised to overcome Europe’s current crises. After all, “the framing of threat response differs, even within Europe” (Lentzos/Rose 2009: 230). In this light, literary and cultural traditions as well as narratives can be seen as the basic, connecting elements of European cultures and can therefore serve as resources of resilience.

This volume aims to explore these interwoven European narratives and understand them as cultural techniques and strategies for the productive handling of manifold crisis experiences. Based on interdisciplinary approaches in literary and cultural studies as well as in history and sociology, the individual chapters contribute to understanding the narrative constructions of Europe, the role of culture(s) within this construct, as well as the creative resources in dealing with Europe’s crises. As literature, in particular, serves as a site and source of cultural creativity as well as constant processes of renewal (Zapf 2006), the focus on cultural explorations of Europe in literature offers a fruitful perspective. Literature not only has the potential “to change minds” (V. Nünning 2014, Elgin 2007, Bruner 1991), but also to negotiate and shape norms and values (Baumbach/Grabes/Nünning 2009). As a starting point for the discussion, these premises on the importance of literature and culture for Europe as sources and strategies of resilience allow for a productive exchange between scholars from different parts of Europe, offering a forum for addressing culture-specific approaches to Europe’s crises as well as to the narratives that – historically, recently, or as a future potential – form a fundamental part of the cultural basis of Europe.

## 2. Culture as a Resource of Resilience to Europe’s Crises: Preliminary Conceptual Remarks

In recent discussions around Europe’s crises, the term/concept ‘resilience’ has gained traction as a shorthand for measures and strategies aiming at the recovery from, and preemptive immunisation against, internal and external crises. In a much-noted article that discusses three European countries’ efforts to manage biorisks, Filippa Lentzos and Nikolas Rose define ‘resilience’ as a new form of governing insecurity. According to their definition,

[r]esilience implies a systematic, widespread, organizational, structural and personal strengthening of subjective and material arrangements so as to better be able to anticipate and tolerate disturbances in complex worlds without collapse, to withstand shocks, and to rebuild as necessary. Perhaps the opposite of a Big Brother State, a logic of resilience